

SCREENING, REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Screening, review, and selection procedures will take place in 3 steps: initial evaluation, technical review, and final selection by the Selecting Official (i.e., the Science and Research Director, Northeast Fisheries Science Center). The peer review step will involve at least 3 individual reviewers per application. The Selecting Official will make the final decision regarding which applications will be funded based upon the numerical ranking of the applications and the evaluations by the peer reviewers as well as the selection factors below.

1. Initial Evaluation of the Applications: The initial screening will ensure that application packages have all required forms and application elements, clearly relate to the 2004 RWRGP, and meet all of the eligibility criteria.

Application packages received by the Protected Species Branch, Northeast Fisheries Science Center and postmarked by the submission deadline (5 p.m. eastern time on April 12, 2004) will be screened to ensure that they: were postmarked by the due date; include one original and 2 signed copies of the entire application package; an electronic copy of the project proposal in Word or WordPerfect format, submitted either by electronic mail or on a compact disk; include the correct OMB forms (424, 424A or 424D, and 424B) signed and dated; identify a Principal Investigator and provide current resumes or curricula vitae for both the Principal and Co-Investigators; identify one of the 9 project categories; include all application package elements; and include MMPA or ESA permit application cover letters, and other environmental documentation, if applicable. Applications that pass this initial screening will be pooled based on the application category (i.e., Categories 1-9) identified by the applicant.

Our ability to pre-screen is dependent upon the submission deadline and the availability of resources.

2. Technical Review: Applications meeting the requirements of this solicitation will undergo an external technical review. Technical review is conducted by a minimum of three reviewers. Each reviewer will individually evaluate and score proposals (0-100 points) using the follow criteria:

a. Importance/Relevance and Applicability of Proposal to the Program Goals: This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. Applications will be evaluated on clear identification of project goals and objectives and the ability to link those goals and objectives to project activities and the applicability of the project's goals and objectives to the RWRGP goals. Reviewers should consider: the likelihood of meeting milestones and achieving anticipated results in the time line specified in the statement of work; the sufficiency of information to evaluate the project technically; if such information is sufficient, the strengths and/or weaknesses of the technical design relative to securing productive results; and if data collection is proposed, the inclusion of quality assurance considerations. the contribution of potential outcomes, results, or products to North Atlantic right whale biology and management; and, the amount of collaboration with other researchers in the right whale field. (Score = 0-50)

b. Technical/ Scientific Merit: This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. Applications will be scored based on their clear identification of performance evaluation methods and the suitability of those methods for evaluating the success or failure of the project in terms of meeting its original goals and objectives. (Score = 0-10)

c. Overall Qualification of Applications: This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. The management of the project will be evaluated based on documentation of previous related experience and qualifications of the project's Principal Investigator, Co-investigator(s) and other personnel, including designated contractors, consultants, and Cooperators. Consideration will be made to previous awards received by the Principal Investigator and outcomes, results, or products (notably peer-reviewed scientific publications) resulting from such awards. (Score = 0-25)

d. Project Costs: This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. The proposed costs and overall budget of the project for all proposed project years will be evaluated in terms of the work proposed. The itemized costs and the overall budget must be justified and allocated appropriately. (Score = 0-15).

e. Outreach and Education: This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. (Score = 0).

This review will involve experts from both NOAA and non-NOAA organizations. The technical reviewers' ratings will be used to produce a rank order of the proposals. No consensus advice will be given by the technical reviewers.

3. Final Selection: After applications have undergone technical review, NMFS Protected Species staff will summarize panel rankings by averaging the scores and prepare recommendations for funding to the Selecting Official (i.e. the Science and Research Director (SRD), Northeast Fisheries Science Center). Only those applications having an average score higher than 60 points in the peer review will be considered for funding.

The technical review ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final recommendation to the NOAA Grants Officer. The Selecting Official shall award in rank order of the technical review ratings unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon the following factors:

- a. Availability of funding
- b. Balance/distribution of funds
 - 1) Geographically
 - 2) By type of institutions
 - 3) By type of partners

- 4) By research areas
- 5) By project types
- c. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA/federal agencies
- d. Program priorities and policy factors
- e. Applicant's prior award performance
- f. Partnerships with/Participation of targeted group

For Factor 4, applicants proposing activities that may require an environmental assessment under NEPA must include sufficient environmental analyses (i.e., permit documentation) to allow program staff to determine whether or not the proposal can be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis.